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Corzine backs bill to regulate trash stations Corzine backs bill to regulate trash stations

By JOHN BRAND Staff Writer, (609) 272-7275 By JOHN BRAND Staff Writer, (609) 272-7275

U.S. Sen. Jon Corzine will sponsor legislation to give state and local officials greater control over rail-yard trash-transfer stations like the one slated for the Pinelands.

Corzine, D-N.J., said he is attempting to correct a federal loophole that has allowed solid-waste companies to build trash sites along federally controlled rail lines and claim exemption from state and local laws.

Mullica, county and state officials oppose Southern Railroad Co. of New Jersey's plan to build a trash-transfer station along federally controlled rail lines. The company says local and state officials cannot stop them because state laws are preempted by federal law.

A federal judge restrained the company in a June 15 ruling from building the station until after the court hears a lawsuit filed by the state against Southern Railroad.

Corzine's law, which will be introduced by U.S. Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., would require companies such as Southern Railroad to gain approval to build from the state's Department of Environmental Protection and comply with county plans.

"It would make local officials active participants in the process," Corzine said. He said the bill should have bipartisan support because the federal law is exploited in other states as well.

Corzine used strong words when discussing the proposal for the Mullica site, calling it a "travesty" because it's to be built in a federal reserve. He categorized Southern Railroad as a "sham" company - one more interested in exploiting the federal loophole for profits than running a legitimate business.

Railroad company attorney John Fiorilla could not be reached Monday for comment.

There are five active trash-transfer stations along New Jersey's rail lines - most of which are located in North Bergen, Bergen County - and other companies are trying to build four more.

Acting Gov. Richard J. Codey said at a Monday afternoon news conference that the unregulated trash companies are allowing the debris to pollute the communities' air, land and water because state and local officials cannot access the sites.

"I don't care what federal loopholes are being exploited," Codey said. "I am not going to stand by and do nothing while these trash heaps take over our state."

Codey announced Monday "Operation Safety Net" to crack down on the active sites. The DEP will look for environmental violations, the state's Department of Community Affairs will look for fire violations and the State Police will inspect vehicles to and from the trash-transfer stations and also investigate the companies that own them.

State Police Lt. Col. Frank Rodgers said law enforcement cannot access the trash sites without companies' permission or unless there is evidence of a crime. He fears the existing laws will open the door for organized crime to control the companies or for terrorist activity along the rail lines.

"We don't know who's running these sites or what's being dumped," Rodgers said.

Two weeks ago, deadly chemicals were found improperly stored and inadequately secured at a Meadowlands rail yard.

DEP Commissioner Bradley Campbell said he will financially penalize any companies that don't comply with DEP orders.

"What we're saying is we're going to harass the hell out of them," Codey said. "We want them to know we're on their butts."

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